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## The Punctator's World: A Discursion (Part Five)

Gwen G. Robinson

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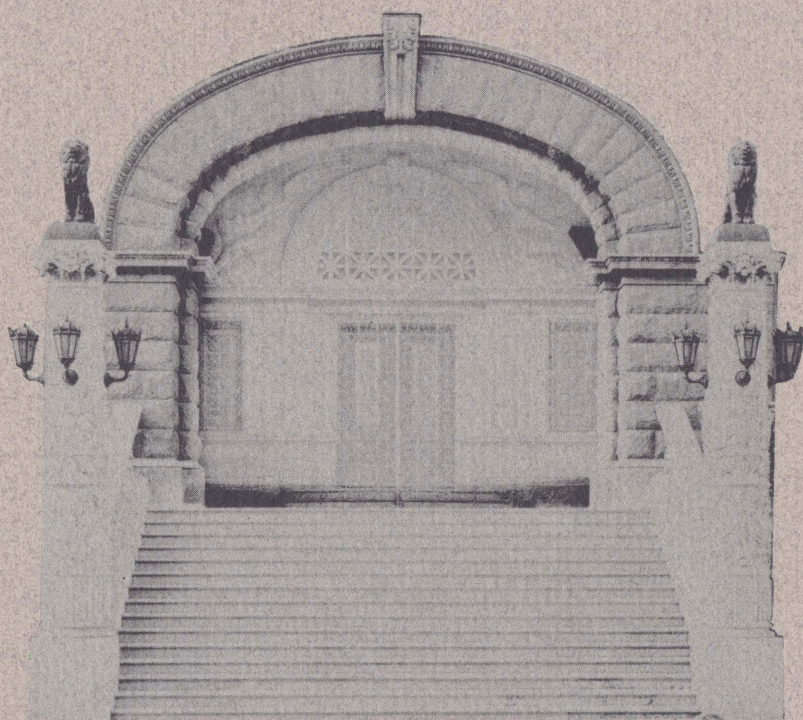
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# The Punctator's World: A Discursion

BY GWEN G. ROBINSON

## Part Five

Logic Takes Over: 1650 to 1755

*This, the fifth in a series on the history and ambitions of punctuation, describes the first vigorous manifestation of logical pointing. In an enlightened atmosphere of book reading and language consciousness, it was discerned that the shapes of sentences and their working parts were better delineated when punctuated syntactically.*

By 1650 print had been setting words on the page for two hundred years and standardizing the conventions that governed spelling, title-page, layout, textual hierarchies, width of margins, tables of contents, indices, typefaces, and bindings. Now punctuation, too, was drawn into the sweep towards an easier intellectual assimilation of written materials. Western Europe was by this time largely literate, and bookreading no longer an esoteric art. Sometime during the latter part of the seventeenth century, the eye had become a second linguistic portal to the brain—as receptive in its own way as the ear. Visual adaptation (born of the alphabet and fortified by print) was now, in the basically aural domain of language, being most vigorously exercised by the reading habit. Meanwhile, the ear continued (and continues) to be its old self—an organ that makes sense out of sounds as they gather shape and drift, often without resolution. Oral utterance, it should be remembered, does not refine meaning so much from words as from words-in-context, and from tone, gesture, volume, pitch.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the listener is content (or at least able) to

1. Walter J. Ong, "Writing Restructures Thought", in *The Written Word; Literacy in Transition*, ed. Gerd Baumann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 39.

glean sense from scatterings of incomplete, illusive structures, the reader awaits a proper syntactical close. The more inclined he is to read in silence, the more dependent he becomes on the completion of grammatical patterns. "What do you mean?" can quickly mend a conversational vagary. In text, the communication is not so conveniently queried.<sup>2</sup>

For many centuries, while writers were pouring forth their souls, readers had subserviently attended. During the pit years of the Middle Ages, insufficiently educated scribes (of whom there were many) relayed Latin tracts onto the page and left them there, dense and undifferentiated, idiosyncratically spelled, and with almost no regard for meaningful cadencing. Such was the mudhole through which the ordinary reader had been forced to slubber, seeking a route to truth. Renaissance vernaculars had at least the blessing of being familiar to their transcribers. When in the fifteenth century the visually oriented printer took over from the aurally oriented scribe, his job was to convey in the clearest possible manner the insights and discoveries of his patron writer to his patron reader.<sup>3</sup> Submitted to type and to the scrutiny of the working multitudes, who did not wish to squander hard coin and leisure time in deciphering ill-expressed statements, written words had to conform to standards that spoken words did not; for in a context that cannot be aided by body posture or voice control (as would be, for example, the sharing of ecstasy or the experience of earthquake) but only by static words, each word must help its neighbor; groups must help neighboring groups, and so on.<sup>4</sup> Under the imposition of printing with its even lines and regularized lettering that made word clusters so easy to spot, sentences exposed their syntactical anatomies. Pinned to the board, as it were, the interdependencies of phrase on clause, clause on whole, and whole on meaning could be freely examined. Thus inconvenienced, readers quite

2. Jonas A. Barish, *Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), 63.

3. The present scene is not significantly different. The writer and his audience being often incompatible—even hostile—today's editor (the referee of printerly contentions) more often than not feels blown by the winds of their misunderstandings. "As long as writers write primarily to advance themselves, and editors edit to satisfy readers, there will never be a lasting peace." Arthur Plotnik, *The Elements of Editing: A Modern Guide for Editors and Journalists* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), 25.

4. Ong, "Writing Restructures Thought", 40.

naturally developed preferences. They discovered that certain arrangements on the page made comprehension easier. And so, in the end, authorial egos were obliged to constrain themselves, and to adhere to the rules of the game.

Because the idea-assemblages represented by language are diverse and multifaceted, a perfect convergence between the meaning intended by a speaker-writer and the meaning arrived at by a hearer-reader is always difficult to achieve.<sup>5</sup> In a world where roads were not paved, where dialects set up barriers and a broad communication was not possible, it was particularly crucial that written language transcend both provincial idiom and variegated spellings and that the logic of verbal sequences be enhanced, if useful exchange was to be a serious goal. A marketplace governed by universal reason was perceived to be one where all humanity could barter.

During the 1600s poets, authors, printers, grammarians, and teachers moved variously to restrict the broad freedoms that had fed Shakespeare's genius. It was as if a new society had waked to an unflattering view of itself—uncultivated, untutored, and in need of containment. The emergent sophistication did not approve the boisterousness of previous generations. In this mood, the guardians of the English language willingly exchanged liberty for the certitude of regulation. By the end of the century, rule had brought order, and the task of artistic polishing passed into the hands of the Augustans—Pope, Swift, Addison, and eventually Dr. Samuel Johnson.<sup>6</sup> But, for the moment, that spacious and well-lit era lay well in the future. The seventeenth century had much work yet to do.

In general, scholars seem to favor the theory that English punctuation had largely changed its character by 1616. That is to say that the rhythmical euphuistic style, with its various aspects, had either incorporated, or yielded to, logical considerations; more explicitly, that the customs of *light* stopping (the sparing use of commas to allow inhaling during page-long sentences), of *metrical* stopping (to delineate the shapes of poems by distinguishing their line endings, caesuras, and verses), and of *oratorical* stopping (to emphasize the rhythms

5. Terence Moore and Chris Carling, *The Limitations of Language* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 50–51.

6. Edmund Gosse, *From Shakespeare to Pope: An Inquiry into the Causes and Phenomena of the Rise of Classical Poetry in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1885; New York: Kraus Reprint, 1968), 13–30.

and parallel word groups of euphuism) had begun to disintegrate in the face of the syntactical revelations that print was bringing to the surface. There is evidence of the hardening logical approach, for example, in the Shakespeare First Folio (1623) as opposed to the nimbler touch found in earlier 'good' quartos. Although Ben Jonson, who customarily supervised his writing into print, had showed an awareness of structure even in his early 1600 quartos, his interest in elucidating syntax became more obvious still in his 1616 folio. In the posthumous collection of 1640 a further jump was made, and the dramatic-cum-elocutionary rhythms that Jonson in his lifetime had so neatly combined with logic retreated yet further. Indeed, the tide had turned. By the end of the century the new direction was plain to see. The 1611 Bible, whose first edition had been so scantily punctuated, was elaborately weighted with grammatical points in the 1683 Cambridge version.<sup>7</sup>

Though change was on the march, it is well to remember that the movement did not represent an organized front in any definitive way. Echoes of skirmishing in the hills, so to speak, can be heard even today, visually oriented though we all are, for oral word patterns are, alas, painfully out of joint with their visual counterparts. Whatever the dictates of syntactical logic may be, dramatic and elocutionary materials—that is, plays, poetry, sermons, prayers and the like—will always allure their transcribers to interpose 'necessary' breathers, be it for emphasis, for oxygen, or to attempt a transcription of voice-sound onto the page. The Englishman came to terms more or less with this discrepancy of rhythmic to logics during the seventeenth century. In the end, of course, logic would dominate. Charles Butler<sup>8</sup>

7. Mindele Treip, *Milton's Punctuation* (London: Methuen, 1970), 15–16, 37–38.

8. Charles Butler, *The English Grammar, or the Institution of Letters, Syllables, and Words, in the English Tongue* (Oxford: William Turner, 1633). This manual, whose publication probably postdated by a decade the actual writing of Jonson's *English Grammar* (for more about Jonson's *Grammar*, see Part Four of "Punctator's World"), caters forthrightly to the logical principles of making text comprehensible. Both authors discriminate grammatically among the four stops: the comma is to qualify phrases; the semicolon to appear before subordinate clauses; the colon before independent clauses; and the period for full conclusion. Thus, the semicolon, a fine-tuner for logical differentiation, is brought into full play. The colon, no longer a mere Elizabethan oratorical marker, is breveted generally to a syntactical rank, though with rhetorical powers still intact—over antitheses, caesuras, emphases, and deep breathing. It is now a point, says Butler, "of perfect sens", but not of perfect sent-

and Ben Jonson, both of whom had figured in the early shift from the established norm, approved the conjoint importance of syntax with rhythms of speech.

The age continued with a succession of progressively more assured publications on grammatical pedagogy. These studies inspect and dissect all manner of detail, from the attributes of an adjective: “Al nouns that wil join with a substantive ar called adjectives; as, gud, high, hard, suet, sour”; to pronominal cases, finite moods, modal systems, and the like—initially taking note how dissolute and lumpish English is when compared to Latin, but gradually, accepting of their separate integrities. The grammars are addressed both to the young (so that they may, as they grow, more easily master Latin—ever supreme—through the intermediary of their own language) and to foreigners (in order to demonstrate how much purer and more elegant English is than are their own barbaric lingo). In the second half of the century English grammar, taught in English, was finally admitted to the grammar school curriculum and came to be studied for its own sake.

One gets a whiff of the period's atmosphere merely by looking over the title pages of late-seventeenth-century grammars. Elisha Coles' *Compleat English Schoolmaster* (London: Peter Parker, 1674), for example, further entitles itself: “or, the Most Natural and Easie Method Of Spelling English. According To the present proper pronunciation of the Language in Oxford and London. Wherein Children and For-eigners shall have the whole Body of English words in the plainest order digested and divided to their hands.” With his own hands so full, the author wisely advises the reader to look elsewhere for pointing instructions.<sup>9</sup>

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enc': which falleth the tone of the voice, with a shorter pause [than a period]". Since it makes only perfect sense and not a perfect sentence, there are sometimes many colons within a sentence. See Butler, pages 58–63. Of the two grammars, Butler's was the more influential. It was better expressed, better thought out, easier to follow, and was published (though not written) earlier. Jonson's grammar was never, as far as is known, used in the classroom. His influence in these matters lay in his own fervent proselytizing and in the meticulous examples to be found in his own publications.

9. Mr. Coles' reputation for accuracy was not immaculate. His other major publication provides a perfect quarry for the scholar who enjoys reading about other scholars and how wide of the mark their fallacious researches have led them. On



The title page of Henry Care's *The Tutor to True English* (London: George Larkin, 1687) offers benefits beyond the mere acquisition of true English. The promise carries on: "or, Brief and Plain Directions, Whereby all that can Read and Write, May Attain to Orthography, (Or the Exact Writing of English) As Readily as if bred Scholars. . . . And several other Observations of General Use; Especially for the Youth of either Sex, and Forreigners." As for the points, this author deals with them crudely in terms of both syntactical 'completeness' (undefined) or 'incompleteness' (undefined) and the pause-lengths required while reading aloud—a dual, but unintegrated, eye-and-ear approach that will persist in the grammatical literature for many decades. Having already given good value for money, Mr. Care then generously throws us a few principles of Arithmetic.

Illustrative of the dual approach is Richard Browne's *The English School Reformed*, published in 1700, but representative of end-of-the-century prescriptive assuredness. Mr. Browne catechizes his students expansively over the field of correct expression in writing. His section entitled "Of Pointing", though scarcely exciting, gives a good picture of how textually meticulous some schoolmasters were getting to be—also, how dominating and boring. One's heart goes out to those piping, trembling young voices that sounded forth so long ago to the ruler beat of Mr. Browne. Let us listen briefly.<sup>10</sup>

Q. *What is the use of Stops or Points in reading or writing?*

A. To distinguish Sense; by resting so long as the Stop you meet with doth permit.

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page iv of the second preface to his *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae compendarius: or, A Compendious Dictionary of the Latin Tongue* (London, 1736), Robert Ainsworth lists Elisha Coles, *Latin and English Dictionary* (1677), commenting along the way that it was designed and written "for the use of scholars of a lower class". Though his intentions were unquestionably charitable, says Ainsworth, Coles' enlarged English-Latin section, which contained more English words and phrases than any previous Latin dictionary, included as well a great number of totally obsolete entries, many of them "interpreted in a wrong sense", and badly translated into Latin. Also, "the *Latin-English* part is very defective" both in the senses attributed to the Latin and in the accuracy of the citations by Roman writers. Nevertheless, says Ainsworth (no doubt, wistfully), "The work being not half the price of Dr. Littleton's, hath gone through twelve impressions". Wrong interpretations, bad translations, obsolescence, defectiveness—these are the things that make a man wealthy.

10. Richard Browne, *The English School Reformed* (London: A. and J. Churchill, 1700; reprint, Menston, England: Scholar Press, 1969), 14.

Q. *How many such pausing Stops are there chiefly to be observed?*

A. Six, *viz.* a Comma, a Semi-colon, a Colon, a Period, a Note of Interrogation, and a Note of Admiration [i.e., the usual collection].

Q. *How is a comma made?*

A. Like a little *c* backwards; thus—,

Q. *When is it used?*

A. At the end of the shortest dependent Sentences.

Q. *What time is observ'd at it?*

A. Whilst one may count two. . . .

Q. *When is a Colon [a four-beater in this treatise] used?*

A. At the end of some greater and more considerable Member of a Sentence. Or a Colon is used when a Comparison, or a notable Opposition of one thing to another is made; as here, Let not the Hand be open to receive, [*comma?*] and shut when it should give: [*colon?*]

Comma? Colon? The door bangs. Mr. Browne is off, and fuming. The printer will pay for this.

Despite the carelessness of their printers, gentlemen such as Coles, Care, and Browne did their bit to quell the linguistic revels of their annoying Renaissance forefathers. As grammatical reasoning grew more habitual, so the grammatical argument became less quirky, less verbosely set forth. The tone of authority is increasingly noticeable.

Meanwhile, logic was discretely pursuing its own visions. The scientific approach to English grammar in the seventeenth century culminated quietly in 1653 with John Wallis's *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* (written in Latin), which was based on an empirical analysis of linguistic data. The author, a Puritan mathematician, concluded after methodical comparison of the two languages that previous grammarians had been forcibly applying Latin's synthetic grammatical norms to English, which, being analytic, had a recalcitrantly different structure. After Wallis, English study progressed within the terms of its own idiom and its flowing syntax was better understood<sup>11</sup>—as can be seen through the nature of the contemporary punctuation.

11. Emma Vorlat, *The Development of English Grammatical Theory 1586–1737* (Leuven: Leuven Univ. Press, 1975), 19–31, and *passim*.

Though the seventeenth century could boast of an impulse towards scientific linguistic analysis, the effectiveness of it did not, as we have seen, reverberate throughout the entire rough and tumble system. In the more conservative pedagogical pockets, euphuism held on, tooth and nail—a tenacious beast, but not unlovable. Partnered with it, sound-oriented punctuation was also loath to go.

In 1640, ignoring Butler and Jonson (and taking a sharp turn from the path that Wallis would soon be blazing), Simon Daines topped the advisements of his apparent heroes, Mulcaster (1582) and Puttenham (1589),<sup>12</sup> for ‘well-tuned’ and ‘commodious’ deliveries. Daines’ *Orthoepia Anglicana* offered the most complete exposition to that date of the rhythmical-elocutionary pointing system. His “briefe peculiar treatise”, some six inserted pages on the four major puncts (with all the usual ancillary addenda, apostrophe to exclamation), acknowledges their importance to “distinct and ready reading” as well as to “right writing”—indeed, they are “requisite to both”.<sup>13</sup> He deals with their application in hierarchical order, in terms of how much time to allow each when reading aloud. The writer is thus advised to write in the manner which will best reproduce his product in sound.

The *comma*, says Daines, is “marked with a semi-circular forme like a halfe Moone decrescent” and is used “onely in long sentences, in the most convenient places to make a small pause [of one beat] for the necessity of breathing; or in Rhetoricall speeches (where many words are used to one effect [that is, where called for by rhetorical symmetries of various kinds]) to make a kinde of Emphasis and deliberation for the greater majesty or state of the Elocution”. The semi-colon, or *Comma-colon* (unknown to the ancients), is especially pop-

12. For commentary on Richard Mulcaster’s views on punctuation, see Part Four, “Punctator’s World”. George Puttenham combined the logical and rhythmical functions of punctuating, advocating that where clash occurred, sense should be the greater consideration, that is, clauses should not be rendered unintelligible by misplaced points. However, the semicolon did not figure in his apparatus of points, and his discussion, being mainly concerned with poetry, addressed primarily problems of metrical pointing: the style that delineates the shape of a poem and stresses internal rhythms. (See Treip, *Milton’s Punctuation*, 27.)

13. Simon Daines, *Orthoepia Anglicana* (London: Printed by Robert Young and Richard Badger for the Company of Stationers, 1640; reprint, Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1967), 69.

ular amongst rhetoricians, who “in their long winded sentences, and reduplications, have it as a constant pack-horse, to make some short deliberation as it were of little sentences, as the *Comma* doth of words; the time of pause [two beats] about double that of the *Comma* generally, which is yet very small”. The *Colon* divides sentences, exacting “halfe the pause of a *Period*; and halfe as much againe as a *Comma-colon* [hence three beats]”. The *Period* “signifies *conclusion*”. But there are big conclusions and little conclusions, and one must be cautious: “When in the middle of a line [the line dot] cuts off any integrall part of a complete Tractate, which goes not on with the same, but begins a new line, it requireth double the time of pause, that it doth when the Treatise persists in the same line: being then foure times as long as a *Colon*, which in the same line is but twice”. Thus, the pauses between paragraphs demand a salvo of twelve beats, whereas those between sentences require only six. Though nothing should be more simple, Daines complicates it wonderfully.

Daines confides that he has used the musical counting of beats, as did his singing-master in his own youth, to teach his pupils about the points, and “to inure them to the distinction of their pauses”. Thus, in the same year that Ben Jonson in his (at last) published *English Grammar* was justifying the distinction of sentences in terms of both breathing and hierarchy of sentence members, Daines was totally engaged in weighing up the appropriate temporal impacts to be derived from the use of the four major stops—with virtually no reference to sense.<sup>14</sup>

By 1680 the subject of punctuation was apparently of sufficient concern to the general public that an entire book, the first of its kind in English, was devoted to it: *A Treatise of Stops, Points, or Pauses* (by an unnamed author who describes himself as a “heartly wel-willer”). But again, though obeisance is made to the issue of sense and to imperfect and perfect sentences, very little on that grammatical level is explained or discussed. The emphasis throughout is on measures of time and the pitch of the voice to premonish a cadency—in short, matters principally rhetorical. The book, considering its date, its topic, and its success, is most interesting indeed.<sup>15</sup>

14. Daines, *Orthoepia*, 70–71. See also Treip, *Milton’s Punctuation*, 28–31.

15. *A Treatise of Stops, Points, or Pauses* (London: Printed for the Author’s Use in his School, 1680; reprint, Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1968), 3–7.

The comma, says the chirpy author, is a little half circle placed at the foot of the last letter of a word. "It is a Note of imperfect Sens, and by it a Sentence is divided into several parts: At each of which parts, where the comma is placed, the voice must be stayed a littl, but the Tenour of it is still to be kept up. . . . Where ever you see a Comma placed, there stop, while you breathe, or while you may tell one."

*A Comma is a Breathing Stop : No more,  
Stop at it while you may tell one, Therefore.*

A semicolon, he continues, "is a Note of an imperfect distinction in the middl of the member of a Sentence, as it were between the parts of a composed Speech". Its value demands a longer stop than the comma.

*Where Semi-Colon placed is; There you,  
May pleas to make a Stop, while you tell Two.*

A colon is a note of perfect sense, "but not of a perfect Sentence, and that becaus, either the part preceding, without the following; or the following, without the preceding, cannot be weli understood". In other words, the colon should be perceived as dividing two perfect sentences that are so much mutually dependent that a full-stop separation would obstruct their being properly comprehended. Thus, it ranks third in the hierarchy of pauses.

*A Colon is a longer Stop; Therefore,  
Stop at each Colon, while you may tell Four.*

A period is also a note of perfect sense. But one "should sound the Word next before the Period a littl longer than the rest, with a Cadency; or letting fall of your voice a littl".

*The Stop, while you tell Six, do not forget,  
Where you do see a Period to be set.*

He then warns that if a writer misplaces any one of the points or if a reader neglects the prescribed time due to each, the true meaning of the sentence will be much perverted.

The polarization of punctating perception, as well as the confusion of it, during this latter part of the seventeenth century is observable. Mr. Christopher Cooper, who has the distinction of producing the last full English grammar to be written in Latin, *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* (1685), also had things to say about punctuation in English. His intention, inspired most likely by Wallis, was to be rational and clear and complete. Being everything to everybody in all ways, he included in his treatise, too, praise for the more elusive elements of euphuistic writing: that is, copiousness, elegance, and facileness. Nevertheless, he held steady on course when dealing with the points, and logic of a sort prevailed.

In his *English Teacher* (1687), he devoted some four pages to the topic of pointing.<sup>16</sup> He begins:

The great use of Pointing is that the sense may be distinguished: Either by the least respiration, which stops the Sentence; or a middle, which delays it; or a full, which laves it down: That it may appear, to which this or the other word or sentence does belong; for the want of true Pointing often causes obscurity, confusion, or contrariety: . . . Concerning Pointing, the Learned themselves do not altogether agree.

Though his initial statement of theory is cloudy to say the least, the prescriptions for practical application of the stops fire forth with a confident show of erudition. Briefly, there are six.

1. The period shows a sentence to be perfect, as when we speak of a new argument or matter without respect to the foregoing sentence.

2. The semiperiod, “Which way of writing dayly comes more into use”, relates to the foregoing matter for sense, but is not joined together by any conjunction in construction—“wherein *therefore* and *for* are left out”. The mark denoting the semiperiod is the same as for the full period, “but distinguished from [it] by a less breach in the line, and the word following beginning with a small Letter”.

3. The colon is put between the dividing members of a sentence.

16. Christopher Cooper, *The English Teacher* (London: John Richardson, 1687; reprint, Menston, England: Scholar Press, 1969), 114–17.

Mr. Cooper then batters us with particulars: protasis, apodosis, proposition, concessive proposition, consequence, reddition—each with a little sample, usually about ‘vertue’, designed (if we are awake) to improve our morals.

4. The semicolon divides dispartes, subdivisions, and opposites. “When the *Protasis* or *Apodosis* is double; the *Semicolon* is set after the first; As, *Diligence makes rich; Idleness poor: for the one gathers; the other scatters.*

5. The comma is “set after other depending Clauses; either shorter sentences, or compounded propositions; whether they are conditional, causal, or relative, or copulative, disjunctive, or discretive; which are join’d to the principal Verb, and are neither whole members, nor half members”. In forming the comma, Mr. Cooper is kind enough to advise us to begin the little semicircle at half-letter height. [The printer then treats us to a sample which does *not* begin the little semicircle at half-letter height. But no matter, we are enough impressed.]

6. The semicomma, he says, ought to be used to take away doubtfulness when words are put out of their grammatical order or before an exegetical addition. He continues, most intriguingly: “For the most part, [the semicomma should lie] where there is no need of more points than there are distinct parts in the sentence. . . . [And] after an Infinitive Mood, a substantive put absolute, or in apposition, and adjectives active and passive, call’d participles, (which when they are placed after substantives are Elliptical;) . . . As, *To tell you these things, is my duty: To practice them, is your wisdom; that you practice them.* [And in case that is too difficult to understand, here is another.] *The King reigning, the Nation was happy; while the King reigned.*” Semicommas are also recommended after vocatives. As for how actually to make a semicomma, we are advised as follows: A “*Semicomma* may have the same mark [as the comma], but less, set at the bottom of a Letter”. No sample is offered in this case. One wonders if that “little semicircle at half-letter height” might now become useful.

#### JOHN MILTON

The works of Milton, whose lifetime straddled the two halves of the seventeenth century, attest to the era’s interfusion of punctating

principles. Mindele Treip, in her extensive and detailed *Milton's Punctuation*, demonstrates within the enclosure of that small world the macrocosmic progress from rhythmical to logical pointing. To this end she presents lines from Milton's *Comus* as they evolved chronologically, from their earliest version (written in Milton's hand) to their final appearance during the author's life in the 1673 edition. Her thesis underlines what the grammars of the time have already imparted to us: that logical punctuation gained ground slowly. The following examples are taken from her book.<sup>17</sup>

2 Bro. heav'n keepe my sister. yet agen, agen & neere.  
 1 Bro. best draw, & stand upon our guard[.] 1 Bro. Ile hallow  
 if he be freindly he comes well, if not a *just Defence is a . . .*  
 defence is a good cause & heav'n be for us,  
 (Trinity MS, ll. 55–58, p. 17)

As Milton first wrote the passage, the punctuation is very dramatic and Elizabethan—that is, lightly pointed to gain the effect of rapid or excited speech—as in the omission of the comma after the second *agen* and the omission of full stops or comma at the ends of the next three lines, as well as in the middle of the last line. In the first line the full stop after *neere* is rhetorically heavy, for the sake of emphasis.

2 *bro* heav'n keepe my sister: agen, agen, & neere  
 best drawe: & stand upon our guard, *El:bro*. Ile hallowe  
 if he be friendly he comes well, if not  
 defence is a good Cause, and heav'n be for us  
 (Bridgewater MS, ll. 473–76)

The scribal Bridgewater manuscript stays fairly close to Milton's pointing, but spoils the alarmed effect of the first line and a half by adding a grammatically correct comma after the second *agen*. The full stop after *neere* is gone, and a semicolon has been inserted after *drawe*—causing a marked change in the sense. It is interesting to note in the following samples how the printers began to feel progressively less confident of the line endings as sufficient indications of pause.

17. Treip, *Milton's Punctuation*, 21–22.



2 Bro. Heav'n keepe my sister, agen agen and neere,  
Best draw, and stand upon our guard.

*Eld: bro.* Ile hallow,  
If he be friendly he comes well, if not  
Defence is a good cause, and Heav'n be for us.

(1637, ll. 486–89)

In the 1637 version, the pointing of the first line and a half is again dramatic, though lighter. It suggests a somewhat different delivery for the actor, less startled, more hasty or excited. But the addition of the two end stops in the second and fourth lines has begun to damp down the total effect of excitement in the passage.

2 Bro. Heav'n keep my sister, agen agen and neer,  
Best draw, and stand upon our guard.

*Eld. Bro.* Ile hallow,  
If he be friendly he comes well, if not,  
Defence is a good cause, and Heav'n be for us.

(1645, ll. 486–89)

Following this cue, the 1645 edition adds another pause, here at the end of the fourth line; and the 1673 edition (see below) completes the damage by adding a last, dragging comma after the second *agen* of the first line.

2. Bro. Heav'n keep my sister, agen, agen, and neer,  
Best draw, and stand upon our guard.

*Eld: Bro.* Ile hallow,  
If he be friendly he comes well, if not,  
Defence is a good cause, and Heav'n be for us.

(1673, ll. 485–88)

As each version added or altered pauses to bring out the grammar, so the dramatic impact of the original punctuation diminished—until by 1673 there was very little of it left. The process affords a miniature history of the development of English punctuation during the course of the seventeenth century, away from an expressive light style towards a flatter, more correct usage. And yet, as Mindele Treip points out, the 1673 edition is still not entirely grammatical in its

punctuation; it ‘lacks’ several heavy stops. We will spare the reader having to go over the lines “agen, agen” to see how they would read if they were rewritten with a fully logical modern or even late-seventeenth-century punctuation.

Before glancing at Milton’s prose it will be instructive perhaps to refresh the memory about the digressive and copious periods (sentences) that seventeenth-century Atticists found so irresistible. The Thomas Browne extract, written in 1643 (to be found in Part Four of “Punctator’s World”, pages 119–20 of the Spring 1990 *Courier*), is a case in point. Anacoluthic in structure, the statement advances in zigzag, without reference to the edicts of grammar. Its loose-jointed segments are not marshalled to seize the argument; but, instead, heavily demarked by colon and semicolon, they come in digressive, semi-autonomous strips. Yet, for the ear, Browne’s prose is packed with assimilable information.

Milton’s prose was better ordered, and not so voluminously expansive between periods. It progressed in a series of complex sentences—mostly short, some long—with the bumps and swells of a mouse-eating snake that from time to time takes in a cat. The resulting bulges, in the case of Miltonian argument, were sentences of many members, which, rationally arranged within their boundaries to sustain the integrity of an idea, maintained—even when moulded by rhythmical pointing—a prevailing syntactical logic. Under the weight of so much verbiage, a purely logical punctuation, with its special talent for distinguishing hierarchical and anatomical detail, would have been helpless. The following example (definitely a cat) comes from his *Areopagitica*.<sup>18</sup> A superscript guide letter has been inserted before each of the major clauses that define what, precisely, that “generall murmer” is that Milton refuses to conceal. In outline, the passage breaks up as follows:

- A. The murmer is (;)
  - a. that if —(,)
  - b. and that [if] —(,)
  - c. [and] if —(,)
  - d. [then] it cannot be —(:)
  - e. and will soon —(.)

18. John Milton, *Areopagitica* (1644; Birmingham: English Reprints, 1868), 61.

All of these items (*a* through *e*) constitute the prolonged murmur of which he speaks (or perhaps murmurs). The light use of commas within these basic members is rhetorically oriented.

And in their name I shall for neither friend nor foe conceal what the generall murmer is; <sup>a</sup>that if it come to inquisitioning again, and licencing, <sup>b</sup>and that we are so timorous of our selvs, and so suspicious of all men, as to fear each book, and the shaking of every leaf, before we know what the contents are, <sup>c</sup>if some who but of late were little better then silenc't from preaching, shall come now to silence us from reading, except what they please, <sup>d</sup>it cannot be guest what is intended by som but a second tyranny over learning; <sup>e</sup>and will soon put it out of controversie that Bishops and Presbyters are the same to us both name and thing.

There is nothing here that countermands the logic of the presentation. Though not accentuated by exact repetition of the 'if' conditionals in *a*, *b*, and *c*, nor resolved by a *then* in *d* preceded by a stronger punct than a comma (which appears so profusely throughout), the idea is there and unfolds with logical progression. The colon after "learning" is particularly expressive. It commands the resolution and introduces with a dramatic pause the crux of Milton's inmost worry.

#### TWO HANDWRITTEN LETTERS

Not surprisingly, handwritten journals and letters offer the most abundant repositories of natural written expression. The following excerpts have been transcribed from British Library manuscripts. The first is a complete sentence and comes from a letter from Andrew Marvell to his Puritan colleague and conspirator, John Milton. The pointing is light, in the manner of earlier Renaissance style. The words seem to spurt; their vitality is undiminished by the printer's grid of heavy stopping. In the manner described by Cooper, the lowercase letter following a line dot (i.e., the semiperiod) is less slowing than a period and capital letter. The colon after "Importance" is both dramatic and informative. Like the modern colon and the co-

lon described by Aldus Manutius II (see Part Four), it is here again forward-looking. The letter is dated 2 June 1654 and addresses Milton as "Honoured Sir".

. . . But my Lord read not the letter while I was with him. which I attributed to our Dispatch, and some other Businesse tending thereto, which I therefore wished ill to, so far as it hindered an affaire much better and of greater Importance: I mean that of reading your Letter. and to tell you truly mine own Imagination, I thought that He would not open it while I was there, because He might suspect that I delivering it just upon my Departure might have brought in it some second Proposition like to that which you had before made to him by your Letter to my advantage.

(Additional MS 4292 in the British Library)

Some forty-six years later (on 19 December 1700), Matthew Prior wrote a single-sentence letter of several pages to the Reverend Mr. James Talbott, fellow of Trinity College, a portion of which follows. It should be noted that the heavy colon stops (herewith marked *b* and *c*) provide pauses of sufficient power to satisfy aurally the modern concept of a full sentential close. Colon *a* ushers in an independent clause that subsides into the dependency beginning "by telling you", which is introduced with less fanfare by the semicolon *d*. Compared to the flexible, quickly paced rhythmical pointing of Andrew Marvell, Mr. Prior's style has taken an enormous plunge down the logical, regularized track originally surveyed in English by Messrs. Butler and Jonson.

It is time, my good friend, that I should answer yours of the 16: Inst:<sup>a</sup> which I will do very briefly;<sup>d</sup> by telling you I have laid aside the thoughts of appearing in Cambridge, and wish very well to the University in the choice of their Burgesses:<sup>b</sup> you might easily have comprehended this to have been my Resolution from my last letters to you, but, may be, it was not very proper for Me to say so sooner:<sup>c</sup> I will not trouble you with any reasonings on this Occasion, since I suppose

my letters may be opened, and read in a Combination room  
or two before they come to your hands; pray assure . . .  
(p. 339 of MS Stowe 755 in the British Library)

#### THE AUGUSTANS 1700–1750

At the opening of the eighteenth century and during Queen Anne's reign (1702–14), England was the scene of brisk commerce, both domestic and foreign. Prosperity prevailed, bringing the gift of leisure time to gentle folk, whose days now opened relaxingly to a spread of vacant hours. These privileged Augustans filled the vacuum with reading and writing—a fact made plain by the journalistic success of such as Daniel Defoe (1660?–1731), Joseph Addison (1672–1719), and Richard Steele (1672–1729), and the vast wealth of extant letters and journals from the period. With the school system now well established, literature and the literate public kept the concern about language alive.<sup>19</sup> Books were everywhere. By 1700 in London, there were 188 people who were bookseller-publishers; also, there were 42 printers, 25 printer-publishers, 7 bookseller-binders, and 4 bookbinders.<sup>20</sup>

The overall intellectual atmosphere did not appreciably change as the new century moved on. The erudite scholarship of seventeenth-century philosophers and scientists diffused somewhat for the sake of a more general public, who lapped up the made-easier ideas from *Spectator* and *Tatler* essays along with their breakfasts. The vulgarization of materials that had hitherto been exclusively genteel, as well as male, opened mental vistas to ordinary women too, and accounts for the concern about the language skills of females that begins to emerge in the grammar books of the eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Grammar, so emphatically brought to the public's attention by ubiquitous print, was scrutinized now by anyone who picked up a book. Thus, another plateau in the standardization of syntax and styles of expression was reached. Unwanted aberrations were progressively modified to accord

19. Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 254–55, 200.

20. Marjorie Plant, *The English Book Trade* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1939), 64.

21. Vorlat, *English Grammatical Theory*, 25.

with the approval of those whose social status or degree of enlightenment allowed them to set up as judges. Sentences such as the following, which had been at one time acceptable, could no longer take the fence.<sup>22</sup> Italics mark the words to notice.

1. I'd spend twentie pound my vaunting-horse *stood* here now. [Ben Jonson, "Every Man Out of His Humour", III.9.50: see Partridge on Subjunctives, p. 128.]
2. So wee grewe together, / *like to* a double cherry, seeming parted [William Shakespeare, "A Midsummer Night's Dream", III.2.209: see Partridge on Compound Prepositions, p. 107.]
3. ...*are* you *crept* hither to see the wrastling? [William Shakespeare, "As You Like It", I.2.138: see Partridge on Use of 'is' and 'was' to form perfect tenses of intransitive verbs, pp. 133–34. Partridge notes of this particular freedom that it well illustrates the grammatical instability of the language in Tudor times. Dryden's 'refinement' of the language meant the excision by educated, post-Restoration writers of similar syntactical practices that invited ambiguity.]
4. ...*every* man/ Surcharg'd with wine, *were* heedlesse and ill-hedded. [Edmund Spenser, "Faerie Queene" IV.1.3: see Partridge on Number after 'each', 'none', 'every', p. 140.]
5. Could you not have untied it, *but* you must cut it? [Ben Jonson, "Every Man Out of His Humour", III.8.24: see Partridge on 'But' with verb, where modern English would use 'without' + gerund, p. 147.]

After the political uncertainties of the previous century, an assurance of permanence was wanted. Indifference to rule was not the admired thing. Renaissance explorations to the peripheries of the English language had done their job and the uninhibited spirit that had given them a fillip was deemed tiresome now by an age that was daily growing more attached to the notion of a world ordered by

22. These samples have all been taken from A. C. Partridge, *Tudor to Augustan English: A Study in Syntax and Style from Caxton to Johnson* (London: André Deutsch, 1969).

ranks and categories. People who 'aspired' worried about what was correct. Regularization, the accompaniment to this posture, pressed the written word into ever tighter moulds that abetted silent reading and cerebral solitude, so that pre-Cartesian habits of disputatious dialogue had less and less to do with hunting down the truth. Though scatterings of earlier attitudes persisted, the eighteenth century proved in the end to be the significant watershed that divided the residual oral culture from the typographical one.<sup>23</sup>

From 1660 on, the old pre-James I calls for an English Academy to regularize, refine, and assure the stability of the language were renewed. Italy had established her most prestigious dictionary-producing Accademia della Crusca in 1612; France had set up a royal charter for her guardian society (later to be known as the Académie Française) in 1635. As always, developments north of the Channel seemed slow. Edmund Waller (1608–1687), who, with John Evelyn (1620–1706)<sup>24</sup> and John Dryden (1631–1700), had been prominent in voicing the urgency of English language governance, complained that no poet could count on his lines lasting in a “daily changing tongue”. In 1693 Dryden (who sometimes, we are told, translated his thought back to Latin in order to decide the correct way to express it in English) wrote in his *Discourse concerning Satire*: “We have no prosodia, not so much as a tolerable dictionary, or a grammar, so that our language is in a manner barbarous”.<sup>25</sup> The eighteenth-century writers felt themselves on steadier ground, but, nevertheless, found English wanting as compared to the more sophisticated languages of the Continent. “Till we have something like an Academy”, wrote Addison, “the controversies between grammar and idiom will never be settled”.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the most renowned of this

23. Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), 69, 211.

24. Waller's sophisticated distichs were much admired by Dryden, and have been credited with having tamed the wild exuberances of the poetry of his period. (See Gosse, *Shakespeare to Pope*, 248–55.) John Evelyn, the well known diarist, was a founding member of the Royal Society, which viewed the stability of the language as an issue of profound importance.

25. Baugh and Cable, *A History*, 254–56, 261. Also quoted is the sad commentary of Thomas Stackhouse (1731): “We write by guess, more than any stated rule, and form every man his diction, either according to his humour and caprice, or in pursuance of a blind and servile imitation”.

26. Joseph Addison, No. 135 (4 August 1711) in “The Spectator” (London: J. M. Dent, 1945), 1:409.

category of complaint was that of Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) in his address to Robert, Earl of Oxford, Lord High Treasurer, entitled *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue*. Here are a few lines in italics, drawn from pages 17 and 18 of the holograph copy, dated 1712, in the British Library (HL 6383), punctuated as Swift himself saw fit to punctuate. Asterisks mark areas where he was, within the same year, overruled by his printer, Benjamin Tooke. Whether Swift was consulted we do not know. Tooke's lines are the matched ones in roman at the right.<sup>27</sup> Also to be noticed is the variation in capitalized letters and italicized words.

*There is another sett of Men who have Contributed very much to the spoiling of the English Tongue; I mean the Poets \*from the time of the Restoration. These gentlemen\* although they could not be insensible how much Our Language was Alreadie overstocked with Monosyllables,\* yet\* to save time and pains\* introduced that barbarous Custom of Abbreviating Words, to fit them to the Measure of their Verses; and this they have frequently done\* so very injudiciously\* as to form such harsh unharmonius Sounds, that none but a Northern Ear can endure.\**

There is another Sett of Men who have Contributed very much to the spoiling of the English Tongue; I mean the Poets,\*from the Time of the Restoration. These Gentlemen,\* although they could not be insensible how much our Language was already overstocked with Monosyllables;\* yet,\* to save Time and Pains,\* introduced that barbarous Custom of abbreviating Words, to fit them to the Measure of their Verses; and this they have frequently done,\* so very injudiciously,\* as to form such harsh unharmonious Sounds, that none but a Northern ear could endure: \*

#### MAJOR GRAMMARS BEFORE JOHNSON'S DICTIONARY

The eighteenth century is well-seasoned with advice by grammarians, whose reasoning tendencies and certainty about right and wrong grew firmer as the decades progressed. A useful volume (devoted, like that of the hearty wel-wisher, entirely to the principles of pointing) is entitled *The True and Genuine Art, of Exact Pointing: As also What Concerns the Distinction of Syllables: the Marking of Capitals: and Italic, or Different Character: To be used in Prints and Manuscripts*. As

27. Jonathan Swift, *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Language* (London: Benjamin Tooke, 1712), 21.



well *Latine*, as *English*. It appeared on the scene in 1704 and thus kicked off the new era in an unexpectedly archaic way. The author, Robert Monteith, has thoughtfully embedded his councils in witticisms, some of which go down without pain.<sup>28</sup>

“Omne tulit punctum”, puns Monteith, “qui punctat singula recte”.<sup>29</sup> “Exactness, in things, which, tho’ appearing *small* in themselves, yet are frequently of the greatest consequence in their *Effect*, Is a part of the character of *Comprehensive Minds*.” Different points, he says in his preface, can totally alter the “sense of a Law, or a nice clause in write”. To anticipate objections and to justify his undertaking, he asks:

Do we not find [that] Ovid [wrote] upon a nut? Virgil, upon a gnat? . . . And albeit some great Spirits like the Eagle, will not descend, to look after a Gnat; Yet the observing the minute Nature, and use of these points, may argue a distinct and clear Mind, capable to discern the smallest things. It is a great Property, in the Man, who omne tulit punctum. And as all Men, in Affairs, desire, and ought, to be most Punctual; So you will take in good part, That I give you this small Treatise, anent the Points.

Farewel.

He then begins. Sound reason is what we must all seek. Without the accurate use of points, dubiousness and uncertainty (not to mention perversion and distortion) will run rampant, and our sons will be doomed to perdition and shame. Which shall we say to them?

My son, if Sinners entice thee, consent thou;  
not Refraining thy Feet.

or?

28. Punctators of all ages have found solace for the unglorifiability of their profession in modest emissions of humor—puns being the favorites. Even today, we come across titles such as: *You Have a Point There* by Eric Partridge; or *Mind the Stop* by G. V. Carey.

29. “He carries his point who points with precision.” Robert Monteith, *The True and Genuine Art, of Exact Pointing* (Edinburgh: John Reid, Jr., 1704), title page and passim.

My son, if Sinners entice thee, consent thou not;  
Refraining thy Feet.

Thus does a child's salvation hang by a semicolon.

The booklet is only fifteen pages long. By the time the author has completed his extensive title and jocular preamble, five of those have been spent. We, his audience, are now primed to receive the more serious details of his thesis, which he now throws at us more or less as one would empty a bucket. Though he attends to pause-lengths, halts, and slowings of utterance, his imperative concern is: so to plant the puncts as not to render the text absurd ("You must observe . . ."; "They erre who . . ."; "A colon requires . . ."), and thus he arrives at the critical core. "The great matter, of Pointing", he says, "consists solely and wholly, upon the Concordance or Government of Words. And therefore those, who are Ignorant of Grammar, can hardly attain to Pointing." With this, we are hurled into a whirlpool of substantives, predicates, conjunctions, adverbs, futuritive particles, for the explication of which his prose style is not helpful. Though he assumes the attitude of a reason-motivated Augustan, one must suspect Monteith of seeking to justify with logic an habitual preference for rhythmic elements. Nevertheless, he represented *in toto* a new phase in the general attitude towards the use of punctuation. *It should be wedded to grammar.* "Construction", a word resonant of scientific and manufactory know-how, pops up again and again. Applying to it the notion of completed-sense-but-not-sentence, Monteith inserts it repeatedly into his regulations for the four major points. But whether his audience came to enlightenment as he intended they should is a matter of great mystery, for his own grammar was so alembicated, so profusely valved and stoppered with puncts, as must have blown the mind of any disciple. Here, for sampling, are a few lines of his wisdom.

To make Points Regularly, each *Construction*, or two together, should have a Comma, and these, to the number of five at most, should have a Semicolon; and afterwards, as many require a Colon: And then as many moe, or perhaps fewer, a Point. Not to say, but, that in a short Sentence, after 2 or 3 Comma's, shut up with a Semicolon, the Sentence may be brought to a Point. Or, sometimes, an Illa-

tive, or Recapitulatory Sentence, may be shut up, with a Comma, or two, one Semicolon, and a Point.

By 1711 John Brightland was doing rather better. "After a *Comma* always follows something else which depends upon that which is separated from it by a *Comma*", he says—which seems clear enough, though it wants a certain artistic touch. His *Grammar of the English Tongue*, composed for "Children, Women, or the Ignorant of both Sexes", was one of the first 'popular' grammars of the time and by the middle of the century had already come out in some eight editions. Steeped in the continental philosophies about language, Mr. Brightland proved quite accepting of the dual punctating concept and counseled his constituency to use stops both for breathing and for the avoidance of obscurity or confusion of sense. With his influential push, we shall see the two conflicting theories of punctuation—one to demark the units of grammar and one to shape elocution—continuing in harness through a major portion of the eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

In 1724 *De ratione interpungendi* by G. J. Vossius was published in London *apud* S. Tooke and B. Motte. This book, written entirely in Latin, purported to explain to learned members of the English public the distinctions of pointing according to the usage found in Holland and West Frisia. The exposition is meticulous<sup>31</sup>—the comma, semicolon, colon, and period, appearing with powers that will not be so clearly and so simply described in common English grammars for another half century. Like Cooper, he too includes in his battery of recommended puncts the much-used (though not so frequently described) *semiperiodus*. "Semiperiodus inter colon & periodum, ut semicolon inter comma & colon, mediam habere potestatem dicitur" (As the semicolon is said to carry a value between the colon and the comma, so does the *semiperiodus* carry a value between the period and the colon). Therefore, he continues, although it terminates a perfect sense, it is connected to what is born new out of itself—and

30. Park Honan, "Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century English Punctuation Theory", *English Studies* 41 (1960): 93. See also Vorlat, *English Grammatical Theory*, 34–35.

31. G. J. Vossius, *De ratione interpungendi* (London: S. Tooke and B. Motte, 1724), 78–80. This book is probably the "ingenious discourse" later praised by Ephraim Chambers (see footnote 37) for precisely differentiating between the semicolon and the colon.

that begins with a lowercase letter. The true period (which in form is the exact replica of the *semiperiodus*, that is, a line dot [there are no illustrations offered]) is put where the sense has become absolute and a sequential statement is not expected. Vossius's clarity and the precision of his thinking gave firm footing to those Latin-literates who drew from him to teach their own less able followings.

A mid-century sample of more ordinary grammatical fare is *A New Grammar* by Ann Fisher, the wife of the Newcastle printer Thomas Slack, schoolmistress of her own Ann Fisher's school, and the producer of a number of (now rare) elementary school books. The *New Grammar* in its some thirty-five editions enjoyed considerable popularity throughout the eighteenth century. As will soon be evident, the punctating principles advocated in it attempt to feed both ear and eye. Her offering comprises the six standard major stops—the two extras in this case being the notes of interrogation and admiration, which are less interesting, since no one ever seems to want to argue about their values or why they are there. The semicomma and semiperiod have by now more or less disappeared from the grammatical dissecting table, probably swept into the bin by the impatience of printers.

Mistress Fisher deals with "Stops and Marks" in chapter 6,<sup>32</sup> beginning as follows:

The Stops are used to shew what Distance of Time must be observed in reading: They are so absolutely necessary to the better understanding what we read and write, that, without a strict Attention to them, all Writing would be confused, and liable to many Misconstructions.

In addition to a careful account of the customary syntactic duties of each stop, she provides directions for counting out the well-established number of beats. "A *comma* stops the Reader's Voice, whilst one may deliberately count the Number *one*." It is used after number lists, vocatives (*Shah, trouble us not with trifles*), and also "after every the least distinct Clause of a Sentence, which is a Part of a more perfect one". A semicolon (one, two!) is used when "half the Sen-

32. Anne Fisher, *A New Grammar* (1750; reprint, Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1968), 38–44.

tence is yet behind, and in distinguishing Contrarieties”: *Are you humble, teachable, adviseable; or Stubborn, self-willed, and high minded?* The colon (one, two, three!) is used to distinguish a perfect sentence, which, though it have a full meaning of its own, leaves “the Mind in Suspense and Expectation to know what follows”. The colon can also be resorted to before a “comparative Conjunction in a Similitude”, for example: *As an ill Air may endanger a good Constitution: So may a Place of ill Example endanger a good Man.* The period and the notes of interrogation and admiration (one, two, three, four!) handily bring all to a halt. Marching thus throughout her treatise, the energetic Mistress Fisher adeptly lays to rest both Evil and Bad Grammar.

The chapter ends with a barrage of textual marks (not an uncommon feature by this time): care must be taken that the caret (^) be put in the exact place, etc.; asterisks (\*\*\*) when appearing in a row signify that “there is something wanting, defective, or immodest in the Passage of the Author”; “Index (☞) the Fore-finger pointing, signifies that Passage to be very remarkable against which ’tis placed”; Ellipsis (---) is to be used when part of a word is left out, as in “K--g G--ge”; and so on.

## DICTIONARIES

The eighteenth century was an age of encyclopedias and dictionaries—dictionaries of all kinds, from horsemanship to mathematics<sup>33</sup>—but most importantly, it produced the dictionary of English words for which Richard Mulcaster had so perspicaciously discerned the need in 1582. Though lists of English ‘hard’ words had been produced, as well as the slightly more sophisticated *English Expositions* (1616) by John Bullokar, *The English Dictionarie* (1623) by Henry Cockeram, *A New English Dictionary* (1701) by John Kersey,<sup>34</sup> and shelvesful of

33. James Sledd and Gwin J. Kolb, *Dr. Johnson’s Dictionary: Essays in the Biography of a Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 19.

34. The unhelpful sparseness of these early ‘dictionaries’ can be sampled by looking up punctuational entries. Henry Cockeram, for example, does not mention either *semicolon* or *punctuation*. For *colon* there is nothing at all anatomical. The entry merely reads: “A mark of a sentence not fully ended”. For *comma* the entry is: “A mark made (,) oft used in writing”; for *period*: “A perfect end of a sentence”.

Kersey is not very expansive either. He describes the comma as being: “a point

Latin-English dictionaries (not to forget Barret's 1580 *Alvearie*—a beehive of English, Latin, Greek, and French), there was no attempt to list *all* the words in the English language before Nathaniel Bailey published his *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* in 1721. This handy book held the field until the appearance of Dr. Johnson's massive two volumes in 1755.<sup>35</sup>

It makes an informative exercise to leaf through the pages of some mid-eighteenth-century lexicographic efforts to see what was then being said about punctuation. For example, Nathaniel Bailey says little of the colon, only that it is "the second of the great Guts"; and (his second entry) "Also a Point in Grammar marked thus (:): which shews that the Sentence is perfect or intire, but the Sense still depending or continuing on". He is equally terse about the semicolon: "a Stop or Point in a Sentence between a *Comma* and a *Colon* marked thus (;)". His explication of the comma derives from the elocutionary notion of small rests and little pauses.<sup>36</sup>

Robert Ainsworth in his *Dictionary of the Latin Tongue* (1736) had barely a comment to make in either Latin or English on "Interpunctio". It is, he informs us, "A pointing, or distinction by points"—

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of distinction"; the colon: "a middle point of distinction"; the semicolon: "a point of distinction, thus marked(;)" and the period: "a perfect sentence, close, or conclusion". He further enlightens us with the news that to point means "to distinguish by *points*" and that punctuation is the "pointing of a sentence". To benefit from this sort of information, one must already know.

35. Baugh and Cable, *A History*, 231.

36. Nathan Bailey, *Universal Etymological Dictionary*. The title page of the first edition of this popular volume makes interesting reading. It describes the contents as providing a brief and clear explication of all difficult words in the English tongue that derive from "Antient British, Saxon, Danish, Norman and Modern French, Teutonic, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew Languages", as well as terms of art relating to "Anatomy, Botany, Physick, Pharmacy, Surgery, Chymistry, Philosophy, Divinity, Mathematicks, Grammar, Logick, Rhetorick, Musick, Heraldry, Maritime Affairs, Military Discipline, Horsemanship, Hunting, Hawking, Fowling, Fishing, Gardening, Husbandry, Handicrafts, Confectionary, Carving, Cookery, etc.", together with a large collection of words and phrases used in "our Antient Statutes, Charters, Writs, Old Records and Processes at Law", not to mention remarkable places and the proper names of men and women. And, perhaps most important of all, is the fact that it offers many "Thousand Words more than . . . any English dictionary before extant", including, and possibly even especially, Kersey's.

something a bird dog could as helpfully suggest. A semicolon is “half a colon in pointing”, neither more nor less. “Colon”, however, swells with information. In the first entry it is the great gut “rising from the left side unto the right, in which is the disease called the collick”. In the second, summarily, it is “a member of a sentence”.

Ephraim Chambers, in the first edition of his *Cyclopaedia: or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (1727), manifests the uncertainty that is appropriate to scientific inquiry. He is plainly baffled about the values and usage of all the four major stops. About the comma he says that it is very “difficult to fix the precise use, . . . [for] different authors define, and use it differently”. The ordinary doctrine is that the comma serves to distinguish “the several parts of a period that are not necessarily joined together”. And on he goes, and on and on, quibbling with the various dictates of published authorities. What about whole phrases when they are divided by partitives? or when they are very short? In discourse, he continues, one notes a musical proportion amongst the pauses denoted by the points: that is, [you have guessed it!] a one-count for the comma, a two-count for the semicolon, a three-count for the colon, and a four-count for the period. Thus, we are escorted through sunlight and shadow, and still, Chambers has not finished all that he has to say of the protean comma. It can be subtle, virile, even pugnacious, when roused. He concludes his colossal entry with the following eulogy:

Frequent commas, as on other occasions they promote perspicuity and distinctness, and ease the reader, both in the rehearsal and comprehension of his author; so, in oratory, are they of especial use and effect; particularly where an adversary is to be closely and pointedly attacked, upbraided, reprehended, wounded, &c.

The colon, says Chambers (calm once more), is used to mark the middle of a period:

or to conclude a sense less perfect than the dot or period:— but a sense less perfect than the period is an expression extremely vague and indeterminate. Others say, a *colon* is to be used when the sense is perfect, but the sentence not con-

cluded—but neither is this over-clear and express. Add to this, that in practice our best writers confound the *colon* with *semicolon*.

He then spars briefly with F. Bussier (a grammarian who did not handle the subject properly), before commending the ingenuity of a later, 1724 punctuational tract (see footnote 31). His description of the great gut, which he demotes to entry position number two, is both plenary and graphic. Interestingly, Dr. Johnson will soon manifest great satisfaction with Chambers' anatomical explicitness, for under his own "colon" entry (again, the second one), he draws amply from this earlier medical fount. All in all, both Chambers and Johnson represent a far cry from the insouciant attitude towards knowledge displayed by Ainsworth or Bailey.

About the boundaries of the semicolon, Mr. Chambers feels that the grammarians are themselves a bit in doubt. They say it marks a sense less complete than the colon and more complete than the comma, "but this only conveys a very obscure idea. In effect, the precise office of the *semicolon*, or what office it is distinguishes it from the colon, is a thing very little known in the world." He explains how the moderns, "refining on their predecessors", have subdivided the colon to create a lesser being, the semicolon—"Some say, without any good foundation in nature; though others stand up for the usefulness of the division".

Under his general entry for "Punctuation", the puzzled and puzzling Mr. Chambers reports:<sup>37</sup>

There is much more difficulty in *pointing*, than people are generally aware of.—In effect, there is scarce anything in the province of the grammarians so little fixed and ascertained as this. The rules usually laid down are impertinent, dark, and deficient; and the practice, at present, perfectly capricious; authors varying not only from one another, but from themselves too.

In a nutshell, it is the wise man who steers clear of the whole subject.

37. Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopaedia: or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, s.v. "comma", "colon", and "punctuation".



Dr. Johnson's massive and single-handed achievement became immediately the great authority. Its imposing two-volumed presence set the standards of English dictionary making throughout the nineteenth century, perhaps to their detriment—since by then, without this monument on the horizon to block the perspective, new knowledge might better have improved the art. For the time, however, the Johnson *Dictionary of the English Language* represented a great step forward, and much in it (besides its quaintness) can still be admired.<sup>38</sup> As will be seen, the flavor of the Doctor's strong personality pervades the text.

His first entry for "colon", then, reads as follows:<sup>39</sup>

A point [:] used to mark a pause greater than that of a comma, and less than that of a period. Its use is not very exactly fixed, nor is it very necessary, being confounded by most with the semicolon. It was used before punctuation was refined, to mark almost any sense less than a period. To apply it properly we should place it, perhaps, only where the sense is continued without dependence of grammar or construction; as, *I love him, I despise him: I have long ceased to trust, but shall never forbear to succour him.*

Johnson is at his best in the preface to his dictionary. Here, profound emotion melds with a natural inclination to express as exactly as possible the contents of his majestic mind. The result is a moving statement, conveyed in stately prose, shorn of the sesquipedalian affectations that belabored so much of what he wrote. His language, in this instance, though encumbered with complicated thought, emerges with pulsing clarity and in such a way that it falls naturally into logically ordered syntactical units, which, unlike those of Browne or Milton, are flagged with *words* to alert the reader to each fresh direction. Thus, whether Johnson himself commanded the pointing in the first edition is almost irrelevant. His meaning is as clear as crystal. His pronominal references are precise; the pointer words set-

38. Sledd and Kolb, *Dr. Johnson's Dictionary*, 1–4.

39. Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. "colon".

A  
D I C T I O N A R Y  
O F T H E  
E N G L I S H L A N G U A G E :  
I N W H I C H  
The WORDS are deduced from their ORIGINALS,  
A N D  
ILLUSTRATED in their DIFFERENT SIGNIFICATIONS  
B Y  
E X A M P L E S from the best WRITERS,  
T O W H I C H A R E P R E F I X E D ,  
A H I S T O R Y of the L A N G U A G E ,  
A N D  
A N E N G L I S H G R A M M A R .

B Y S A M U E L J O H N S O N , A . M .

I N T W O V O L U M E S .

V O L . I .

Cum tabulis animam censoris sumet honelli :  
Audebit quæcumque parum splendoris habebunt,  
Et sine pondere erunt, et honore indigna ferentur.  
Verba movere loco; quamvis iuvata recedant,  
Et veritatem adhuc intra penetralia Vestis:  
Obscurata diu populo bonus eruet, atque  
Proferet in lucem speciosa vocabula rerum,  
Que prius memorata Catonibus atque Cethegis,  
Nunc situs informis premit et deserta vetustas. H O R .

L O N D O N ,

Printed by W. STRAHAN,

For J. and P. KNAPTON; T. and T. LONGMAN; C. HITCH and L. HAWES;  
A. MILLAR; and R. and J. DODSLEY.

M D C C L V .

*Price Bound, Lettered and Gilt, Four Boards  
and eight Shillings, both Volumes.*

A sophisticated, visually oriented title page. From the first edition of Dr. Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*. Courtesy of the Syracuse University Library.

tle the clausal relationships so expertly that the eye can lead the voice through their sequence even without the aid of inter-sentential punctuation.

The following paragraph from the preface to his *Dictionary* illustrates his masterful technique:<sup>40</sup>

Some senses however there are, which, though not the same, are yet so nearly allied, that they are often confounded. Most men think indistinctly, and therefore cannot speak with exactness; and consequently some examples might be indifferently put to either signification: this uncertainty is not to be imputed to me, who do not form, but register the language; who do not teach men how they should think, but relate how they have hitherto expressed their thoughts.

In these few lines, we find two semicolons and a colon helping to segment the long final sentence. The colon essentially chops it in half and the two ends, though related, have each a vigorous integrity—the first portion implying the appearance of the second, in the resumptive manner used today. The semicolons quarter each half, not very necessarily by modern standards, and there is little more to be said about either of them. In the grammar appended to the preface, Johnson did not discuss the general philosophy of punctuation, relying no doubt, on his subsequent definitions to satisfy this particular curiosity. The approach, however, (excepting his vacillation over the semicolon) is distinctly logical. In the matter of the comma, he maintains that it is a point used to distinguish clauses: it demarks the “order of sentential construction”—and there is no mention of counting, or pause-lengths for reading aloud. What, by way of point of view, could be more plainly syntactical? With the publication of his *Dictionary*, the acclaimed and vastly admired leader of intellectual and literary England (*pace* Mr. Maxwell<sup>41</sup>) had cast

40. Johnson, *Dictionary*, C1v.

41. Shortly after the publication of the *Dictionary* in 1755, a Mr. Maxwell (who was himself compiling a dictionary to end all dictionaries) attacked Johnson in the *Edinburgh Review*. His own volumes, he claimed, would list seventy-five birds that Johnson had overlooked. Where Johnson had omitted Chaucerian, Scottish, and dialect words, he would include them—not to mention Johnson’s meagre thirty heads under the word “as”, whereas he, Mr. Maxwell, intended not less than ninety. Others in time would complain at Johnson’s ungodly “Hottentot” or “Patagonian”

his vote for all to see. The following Boswellian quotation is elucidating.<sup>42</sup>

He talked of Lord Lyttelton's extreme anxiety as an author; observing that "he was thirty years in preparing his History and that he employed a man to point it for him; as if (laughing) another man could point his sense better than himself.

Although a great number of eighteenth-century English grammars, spellers, and pointing treatises show a healthy respect for sound,<sup>43</sup> the eminent literati had tipped the balance to logic by the middle 1700s. Syntactical progression, matters of sense, and grammatical hierarchies were at last the proclaimed and predominant considerations in breaking up text. With that principle established, punctuation came to be more visually oriented and inclined to suit the contours of grammar. A general confidence about its capabilities and applications also came into play.

In this year of Johnson's monumental achievement, Solomon Lowe, about whom very little is known beyond the fact that he maintained a school for young gentlemen in Hammersmith, wrote and had published *The Critical Spelling-book: An Introduction to reading and writing readily and correctly. In a manner more commodious than any, and more comprehensive than all the spelling-books that ever were publisht. Designed for a standard of the language: and contrived by a proper gradation of instructions, disposed in a picturesque manner, for the easy and expeditious attaining-to a rational knowledge of it.* This lengthy title, which is typical of its time, seems eminently qualified to represent ordinary grammatical outlook. About the points, Mr. Lowe has not a great deal to say. He is firm, cavalier, and blessedly brief. The use of points,

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word definitions—one of the most vociferous being Noah Webster. See Stanley Rypins, "Johnson's Dictionary Reviewed by his Contemporaries", *PQ* 4 (1925): 281–86.

42. James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson, L.L.D.* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1884), 2: 314–15.

43. Michael Mattaire (1712), Isaac Watts (1721), John Ward (1724) Isaac Barker (1733), Ann Fisher (1750), John Smith (1755), Robert Lowth (1762), William Perry (1774), Thomas Sheridan (1780), Joseph Robertson (1785), James Beattie (1788), Charles Coote (1788), and Lindley Murray (1795), to name a representative few. All make reference to elocutionary principles in their essentially syntax-grounded theories of punctuation.

he says, is to ascertain the sense of words in the construction; and to regulate the pauses and the accent of the voice in reading. The two ideas are clearly separate. And that is that. Here is his compacted conclusion:<sup>44</sup>

, *Comma*, at shortest pauses, *I, and thou*,  
; *Semicolon*, at greater distinctions. *do read*;  
: *Colon*, at larger members. *but ye, and they do not*:  
. *Period*, at complete sentences. *we, then, are best*.

#### MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE PRINTER'S

The emergence of today's editor from the conglomerate mass of printer-owner, compositor, and learned (and not-so-learned) corrector is a tale unto itself. Nevertheless, a disquisition on punctuation, with all the fuss and fiddling that the art entails, requires a mention of the early misunderstandings between the author and his printer. "The fautis escaped in the pryntyng" of John Rastell's 1639 edition of *A dyaloge of syr Thomas More Knyght* numbered some 254. The errata list makes emendations for misspellings, dropped words, omission of negatives, instances of dittography, and punctuation. We must assume that the alcohol levels in Rastell's shop had reached a new high during the period of this printing. According to wrathful authors, reposeful, drunken figures ornamented shops throughout the land; whereas printers contended (equally wrathfully) that it was the haste and carelessness of writers that marred the final product. There is an archive of accusatory and caustic complaint that moves in both directions. Using Percy Simpson's wonderfully detailed *Proofreading in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*,<sup>45</sup> we will run through a sampling of those remarks.

At first, nobody seems terribly concerned about the matter of an error or two. Richard Burton in 1621 appends to *The Anatomy of Melancholy* a note of casual apology for the omissions and faults of the press. His manuscript was written in haste, he explains, and he

44. Solomon Lowe, *The Critical Spelling Book* (London: D. Henry and R. Cave, 1755; reprint, Menston, England: Scholar Press, 1967), 149.

45. Percy Simpson, *Proofreading in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1935), 13.

could not always be there himself. And even if he had been there, he could scarcely have caught the many mistaken, added, and omitted letters, or the false points, for “The Miller sees not all the water goes by his Mill . . . [and to] point at each particular of which were to picke out the seedes of a foule bushell of corne”.

Herrick in 1648 was less phlegmatic about the printing of his *Hesperides*. He headed the list of errata with the following charming, but acerbic, quatrain.

For these Transgressions which thou here dost see,  
Condemne the Printer, Reader, and not me:  
Who gave him forth good Grain, though he mistook  
The Seed; so sow'd these Tares throughout my Book.

In the meantime printers were not sluggish to vindicate themselves either—indeed, to go into full, printed, personal attack. They blamed the author for bad handwriting, lines crossed out or interlarded with rephrasings, for blotches of ink and the annoying habit (when they did show up to read proof) of changing the text between pulls, while the pressman, rendered idle, no doubt reached for his flask. Fed up with this sort of authorial indifference, the printer Speed in the early seventeenth century wrote thus to Sir Robert Cotton, whose “fast eye” had “overune” errors during his visit (hasty, no doubt) to read proof in his shop:<sup>46</sup>

I have sent you a cobby of some part of that wch you have already sene . . . beseiching yo<sup>r</sup> Worrshipe to read it more attentyvly, to place the Coynes, and what adhesions you will before you returne it, And I pray you to past a paper where you doe adde, and not to interline the cobby, for somewhere we cannot read yo<sup>r</sup> notes because the place geues your pene not rome to expresse your mynd.

In 1572, we find a translator stepping to the podium. Apologetic, ‘R.H.’ applies his pen to the page of “Fautes escaped in the Print” in *Of ghostes and spirites walking by nyght . . . One Booke, written by Lewes Lavaterus of Tigurine* and beseeches the gentle Reader to par-

46. *Ibid.*, 34.

## ERRATA.

**T**Ho' there is an Excuse at the End of *C. M's* History for *Errata's*; it being counted impossible to find a Book printed without 'em; or for the Hands of *Briareus*, or Eyes of *Argus*, to prevent them: Yet to avoid all Cavils, I thought fit to note these following; which the Reader is desired to Correct, or not impute them to the Authors.

In *G. Bishope's*.

Title-page to the first Part, line 24. for 1658, read 1659, p. 89. Marg. l. 17. r. 7, 14, 16, 17, &c. Bo. l. 23. r. 1658, p. 104. l. 28. r. *all were*, p. 108. l. 6. dele *not*, p. 116. l. 32. dele *and speaking*, p. 160. l. 27. set (*as*, and l. 29. after *Man*) and dele *but*, p. 182. Marg. l. 3. r. *Tear* 1702, *saying*, p. 253. l. ult. f. *is*, r. *it*, p. 255. l. 21. r. of *us*, p. 278. l. 23. r. *this is*, p. 292. l. 4. r. *wait to*, p. 305. l. 10. r. 1659. p. 423. Marg. l. 13. f. *judged*, r. *indeed*, p. 477. l. 10. dele *hereafter*, p. 481. l. 29. r. *somewhat is*, p. 488. l. 27. r. *World, especially of them called Protestants*, Marg. r. 5, 7. and *Groom's Glass*.

In the Answer.

P. 7. l. 11. *get he doth say*, in Italick, p. 10. l. 7. r. *w—*, p. 30. l. 21. r. of the *Bridegroom*, p. 31. l. 12. r. *beard—*, p. 42. l. 26. r. *many other Men*, p. 44. l. 5. r. *—and—*, p. 47. l. 12. f. *the*, r. *that*, p. 51. l. 19. l. *Closet*, r. *Study*, l. 30. set (*vix.* and l. 31. *Witches*)—, p. 55. l. 26. f. *one*, r. *own*, p. 65. l. 32. f. *our* r. *your*, p. 66. l. 12. dele of *Christ*, p. 70. l. 25. r. *Prayer—*, p. 72. l. 13. after *selves*, add, *as one of their own Officers confess'd, as aforesaid*, p. 381; p. 73. l. 13. f. *they*, r. *had been*, p. 74. l. 1. —*that—*, p. 88. l. 1. f. *They did*, r. *And*, p. 89. l. 6. f. *them*, r. *Innocent Sufferers*, l. 10. f. *which*, r. *whom*, p. 90. l. 5. r. of *that*, l. 22. f. *what tho'*, r. *suppose*, and r. *unable to*, l. 29. r. *and—*, p. 100. l. 11. f. *my Reader*, r. *the World*, p. 101. l. 4. t. *Iniquities were*, p. 105. l. 24. r. *others to*, p. 107. l. 5. r. *in print of*, p. 109. l. 6. f. *Jane Stokes*, r. *Joan Brokesup*, l. 9. r. *from thence*, p. 113. l. 15. for *their*, r. *the*, p. 130. l. 13. dele *more*, p. 132. l. 4. r. *hands*, p. 140. l. 20. r. *evidently seen*, 145. l. 13. f. *home*, r. *back*, p. 148. l. 33. r. *New-English*, p. 150. l. 33. r. *whom they*, p. 151. l. 12. r. of *poor People*, p. 152. l. 37. r. *New-English*, p. 154. l. 1. f. *G F's*, r. *G. Fox*, l. 2. r. *without them*, l. 18. r. *has therefore*, p. 155. l. 36. f. *he*, r. *it*, p. 159. l. 21. dele *People*, p. 162. l. 24. r. *Jesus Christ*, p. 163. l. 7. r. *Good Men*, l. 20. f. *them*, r. *East-Country*, p. 184. l. 30. r. *in the*, p. 185. l. 8. r. *Prophets that have written concerning them*, p. 193. l. 2. r. *such an All*, &c.

Some other Litteral Errors there may be, as *to*, for *unto*; *unto*, for *into*: *on*, for *upon*; and an *s* wanting in some words, as *Way*, *Annoyance*, *Massachusetts*, *Governour*, *Magistrate*, *Herefie*, &c. and *e Contra*, which is not very material; or the Reader uponob seivng may casily C orrect or Excuse.

Errata page, from George Bishop and John Whiting, *New-England Judged, by the Spirit of the Lord* (London: T. Sowle, 1703). Courtesy of the Syracuse University Library.

don the Printer, who [is] no Homer in Latin or Greek, nor even in English for that matter: "Yet can [he] nod and take a nap, as well as any Homer. Howbeit in deed [he is] herein pardonable, because the Copie was somewhat obscurely written, as being the first original. Farewell."

Dryden, who was sensitive about pointing, frequently locked horns with Tonson, his printer. He complained in a letter to the Marquess of Normanby of Tonson's false pointings, omissions of words, and even a wrong reference. As copy for the printer was often at that time made by a calligrapher, Dryden was particular that the job for his *Virgil* be done legibly, on "very large paper" with a "very large margin", so that he might go over it with care and add notes. Apparently, Tonson was not so painstaking and in the end, there was considerable acrimony flying between the two. "Upon triall", wrote Dryden, "I find all of your trade are sharpeners. . . ."<sup>47</sup>

Though often the underdog, the corrector, as he became a more exalted figure on the workshop floor, was able to sink his barbs too. Percy Simpson rendered into English prose the following Latin poem by Cornelius Kiel (scholar and author, who worked at the Plantin press from 1558 to 1607). It quite successfully suggests the frustrations that would shortly be hounding compositor-correctors in the north.<sup>48</sup>

The task assigned to us is to correct the clotted errors in books and to mark them down at the proper points in the text. But the meddlesome fool who is troubled with the itch of writing, a raw uncultured blunderer, amasses quantities of copy, seldom puts in punctuation, disfigures his manuscript with erasures and makes the paper filthy. No locking up of his work for nine years, no finishing touches of the artist: he rushes idle whims into print. Then when the critics cry out that his work is blankly uninspired, Meddler shows his teeth and catches at any means of defence: he snaps at the corrector and accuses him. Booby, a truce to this constant shifting of the blame on the innocent victim in the printing house! He will never corrupt a text which is sound. Now take a hint, Sir Meddler: in future lick your litter into shape yourself! Any man who corrects the mistakes of another receives more than his share of odium, and not one word of thanks.

47. Simpson, *Proofreading*, 44. See also Arthur W. Hoffman, "Dryden's *Virgil*: Some Special Aspects of the First Folio Edition", *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier* 19 (Fall 1984): 76. This article (pages 61–80) offers more on this entertaining feud between Dryden and Tonson.

48. Simpson, *Proofreading*, 220–21.



Into this scene came the gentlemanly Joseph Moxon. In the second volume of his *Mechanick Exercises* (1683), in which he explains (for those seeking a hobby) the art of printing, he says that the compositor's strict duty is to follow his copy. He then retreats from this stand, realizing possibly, the intractable mess that would ensue—authors having the brains of butterflies—were the statement to be taken imperatively.<sup>49</sup>

But the carelessness of some good Authors, and the ignorance of other Authors, has forc'd Printers to introduce a Custom, which among them is look'd upon as a task and duty incumbent on the Composer, viz. to discern and amend the bad Spelling, and Pointing of his Copy, if it be English; . . . Therefore upon consideration of these accidental circumstances that attend Copy, it is necessary that a Composer be a good English Schollar at least; and that he know the present traditional Spelling of all English Words, and that he have so much Sence and Reason, as to Point his Sentences properly: when to begin a Word with a Capital Letter, when (to render the Sence of the Author more intelligent to the Reader) to Set some Words or Sentences in Italick or English Letters, Etc.

In the same year (1755) that Dr. Johnson's *Dictionary* was published, another important and influential book also came on the market: *The Printer's Manual* by John Smith. This professional guide to the *arcanum arcanorum* of the printing arts offered very specific instructions to the novice apprentice. Looking through these pages, one finds oneself in an entirely different atmosphere from the jovial, somewhat mystical world that Monteith was butting around in only five decades before. Mr. Smith propounds his views waspishly, with great assurance. He will not endure opinion from any of his staff, nor hesitate to rap the knuckles of a slovenly author, who "ought to

49. Joseph Moxon, *Mechanick Exercises* (London: Printed for Joseph Moxon, 1677–83), 2:198. By Moxon's time correctors were hired regularly in printing offices, and their prestige and responsibilities were great. See also Plant, *English Book Trade: The corrector was required to be most "sagacious in pointing"* (148). By the end of the seventeenth century it was customary for proof to be sent out to the author (71). He was no longer needed (or wanted) on the premises.

hand in very accurate copy” and very “carefully peruse the Proof-sheet”.<sup>50</sup>

It used to be the Law of Printing that a “Compositor should abide by his Copy, and not vary from it, that he may clear himself, in case he should be charged with having made a fault”. But that concept is now obsolete, and most Authors expect both the Compositor and the corrector to spell, point, and “digest their Copy”:<sup>51</sup>

Else many good books would be laid aside, because it would require as much patience to read them as books did, when no Points or Notations were used; and when nothing but a close attention to the sense made the subject intelligible.

He then recommends to the corrector who is knowledgeable in the language and field that he should freely (yes, *freely*) make alterations in the text “so as not to postpone his business” and to amend the infelicities “especially if they are of no real signification; such as far-fetch’d spelling of Words, changing and thrusting in Points, Capitals, or any thing else that has nothing and (perhaps pettish) humour for its authority and foundation”. On pain of physical injury, no happy-go-lucky author or beery printer would have wished to wander into this irascible gent’s shop without first having built up an unquenchable thirst for punctuation. “He who will not endeavor to place a Comma properly, will not know where to put a Semicolon, or other Point; and therefore ought to learn it by dint of a Bodkin.” (Mr. Smith is serious.)<sup>52</sup>

Of the semicolon he says this:

The Semicolon is a Point of great use to enforce and to illustrate what has been advanced, and digested by the comma. It serves likewise to concatenate such parts of a period as are to be supported by a Point of more elevation than a Comma, which helps to relate the matter more distinctly; whereas the Semicolon keeps the parts of an argument together.

50. John Smith, *The Printer’s Grammar* (London: W. Owen and M. Cooper, 1755), 273.

51. *Ibid.*, 200.

52. *Ibid.*, 92–93.

Of the colon:

The Colon is a Point, prior both to Comma and Semicolon. It shews where the first part of a paragraph has been digested by Commas and Semicolons, for making observations, objection, or enlargement upon it, before the Full-point puts a stop to it.

Thus, the comma digests whatever it can get hold of; the semicolon digests the comma; and the colon, advancing in full gape, digests the lot.

Not only for his staff does Mr. Smith require the highest standards of pointing proficiency, but for his stupid authors as well. And why not? Since we have a sufficiency of points whereby to express the construction of a “subsect”, pointing should be considered as crucial to all who write, for the precise expression of their statements.<sup>53</sup>

For since Pointing is become a mere humour, which is sometimes deaf to rule and reason, it is impossible for a Composer to guess at an Author’s manner of expressing himself, unless he shews it in pointing his Copy: and if he would have the Reader imitate him in his emphatical delivery, how can a writer intimate it better than by Pointing his Copy himself?

Just so. But if through carelessness or poor intelligence (both, in fact, quite likely) the author has failed to indicate his sense, then the compositor must assert his wisdom. As all of us know, it is no fun asserting wisdom when there is no one around likely to appreciate it. For this reason, the compositor’s happiness has an unfortunate, ephemeral quality and comes but rarely—when he is working for true, gentlemen authors who take care over their copy and who<sup>54</sup>

have regard to make the reading of their Works consonant with their own delivery, point their Copy accordingly, and

53. Smith, *Printer’s Grammar*, 86.

54. *Ibid.*, 89.

abide thereby, with strictness: which, were it done by every  
Writer, Compositors would sing, *Jubile!*

And so by the middle of the eighteenth century, the book world had begun to mature into what we know it to be today. The good writers were charging themselves with the responsibility of communicating as truly as possible, in the now settled language, to the now literate public. No longer so trustful of the ego's scope, they checked their imaginations against scientific realities. The good printers were proud men and proper craftsmen, the interpreters of authors to their public. As for punctuation, though never a hero, it continued to acquit itself well. In an era of immense achievement, the modest stops and points played a role in the visual organization of the written language. Where a need was descried, they proceeded to the task. With the passage of decades, all the efforts of invention, all the fiddlings and fussings and fumings would absorb into the embrace of literature, the struggles forgotten. What was printed in Samuel Johnson's era is easily assimilable today. For that, let us join with Smith's chorus of compositors and gratefully sing *Jubile.*

Farewel.